Robert A. Rutland (ed.), *The Papers of George Mason, 1725–1792* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1970, 3 vols. £21.50). Pp. cxxvii, xxi, xxviii, 1312.

William T. Hutchinson and William M. E. Rachal (eds.), *The Papers of James Madison*, vol. 6, 1 January–30 April 1783 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1969, £6.75). Pp. xxxi, 545.

'We came equals into this world, and equals we go out of it.' These famous words of George Mason's, which do not seem to preclude the possibility of our ceasing to be equals at some period between these salient events, are carved over the entrance to the Virginia State Library. They appear in Remarks advocating annual elections for the Fairfax Independent Company, in April 1775; according to the Editor, Mason thereby 'helped to initiate a democratic process which was regarded in nearby Maryland as an assault on the established order' (I,232). It is all the more interesting to observe the strong presumption of social rank on which these remarks are predicated. 'Upon this generous and public-spirited plan', says Mason,

> gentlemen of the first fortune and character among us have become members of the Fairfax Independent Company, have submitted to stand in the ranks as common soldiers, and to pay due obedience to officers of their own choice. This part of the country has the glory of setting so laudable an example . . .

Moments of crisis, calling for public action, have the effect in these papers of marking in strong colours the duties and assumptions of social leadership on the part of the gentlemen. On the other hand, the duties of the common people became less clear when the leadership was divided, and particularly when the War of Independence exposed them to British depredations involving prolonged suffering, insecurities and, of course, the draft.

Mason's leading interests emerge very clearly. The greatest was land. As a speculator and as a manager he was attentive, shrewd and extremely persistent; there can be few men whose papers more plainly reveal the intimate connexion between land development and the long-term aims of the American leadership especially outside New England. Mason was far more typical than Jefferson, who was singularly devoid of interest in either acquisition or speculation. Mason also maintained a lifelong interest in the European marketing of his produce; in later years his family interests, which ranked with the others, became more intimately linked with commerce when his son John set up as a merchant in Bordeaux – where in 1790 he found it expedient to take the oath under the new Constitution. The most familiar papers here are those which deal with the Virginia Constitution of 1776 and with Mason's conduct at Philadelphia and Richmond over the federal Constitution. Notwithstanding these contributions, Mason's most persistent interests included the avoidance of public service; not many contemporary protestations on this account can have been more plainly sincere. Yet politics impinged on his interests, as much as on his principles, in ways that made him a politician. He did not share Jefferson's view as to the shortcomings of the state constitution and was alarmed by the proposals for a new revising convention at the close of the war; his Virginian particularism, moreover, was tighter than Jefferson's and, of course, than Madison's.

Nevertheless, he recognized the need to strengthen the powers of Congress, and, at Philadelphia, he did not oppose the Virginia Plan; he turned wholly against the Constitution only during the last couple of weeks of the Convention. After having refused to sign it, he proceeded to find an increasing number of objections. His celebrated attacks on slavery at Philadelphia, of which rumblings occur in his letters from a much earlier date, may well have been more cathartic than practical; he contributed to the Richmond Convention not only by attacking the slave trade, but by criticizing the Constitution because it failed to *protect* the existing slave property of the South. He never seems to have freed a slave of his own, and his will deeds his slaves to his children. Mason was not an even-tempered man, but illness gave him more than his share of discomfort, even if it was his ally in his aversion to public service. His papers contain elaborate prescriptions for flux and other disorders. There is a good deal of acrimony in these papers, and his feud with the magistrates of Alexandria throws light on the society of the Northern Neck.

The Editor's contribution includes a glossary of names and places that readers will find useful for reference, and succinct, unobtrusive commentaries on complex issues; that on the land question, involving the early land companies, is a nice revision note on a difficult subject. There are also useful references to the comments of historians; the whole task has been accomplished with admirable skill and dedicated scholarship. Mason's career interwove with Madison's, to which it stood in a contrast sharply illustrated by volume 6 of the *Madison Papers*. These 185 pieces were written during the first four months of 1783. Madison, as a member of Congress, was deeply engaged in trying to maintain its solvency and in strengthening its power to act on the states. A debate on 21 February finds him declaring that ' the constitution [meaning the Articles] was as sacred & obligatory as the internal constitutions of the several States; and that nothing could justify the States in disobeying acts warranted by it, but some previous abuse or infraxtion on the part of Congs . . .' Some valuable notes here supplement the official records of the debates; other papers reveal the problems created for Congress by the conduct of their delega-

tion in Paris in neglecting to confide in their French allies. Madison and his colleagues had no doubts but that they were grappling with the exigencies of a ' critical period '. The editors maintain their usual exemplary standards.

Churchill College, Cambridge J. R. POLE